



Knowing the Reader

by PATRICIA A. EDWARDS

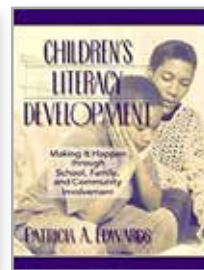
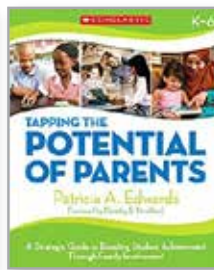
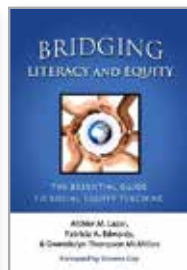
“If a child comes from a reading family where books are a shared source of pleasure, he or she will have an understanding of the language of the literacy world and respond to the use of books in a classroom as a natural expansion of pleasant home experiences.”

—Ellen Mahoney and Leah Wilcox



LITERACY CHAMPION: PATRICIA A. EDWARDS

Patricia A. Edwards, a member of the Reading Hall of Fame and a NCRL (National Conference on Research in Language and Literacy) Distinguished Scholar, is a Professor of Language and Literacy in the Teacher Education Department at Michigan State University. She is an internationally recognized expert in parent involvement, home, school, community partnerships, multicultural literacy, early literacy, and family/intergenerational literacy, especially among poor and minority children. Pat is the first African American president of the Literacy Research Association, and the 2010–2011 President of the International Literacy Association. She developed two nationally acclaimed family literacy programs: *Parents as Partners in Reading* and *Talking Your Way to Literacy*. She has authored or co-authored numerous publications and books including *A Path to Follow: Learning to Listen to Parents*, *Bridging Literacy and Equity: The Essential Guide to Social Equity Teaching*, *Change Is Gonna Come: Transforming Literacy for African American Students*, *Tapping the Potential of Parents: A Strategic Guide to Boosting Student Achievement Through Family Involvement*, *Children’s Literacy Development: Making It Happen Through School, Family, and Community Involvement*, *New Ways to Engage Parents: Strategies and Tools for Teachers and Leaders*, and *Partnering with Families for Student Success: 24 Scenarios for Problem Solving with Parents*. She received her B.S. in Elementary Education from Albany State University (Albany, Georgia); the M.S. in Elementary Education from North Carolina A&T University, her Educational Specialist in Reading Education from Duke University; and her Ph.D. in Reading Education from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



One to Know: Knowing the Reader

According to Margaret Mooney (1996), attitudes, understandings, and behaviors can be grouped into three broad phases of reading development: emergent, early, and fluency (see adapted version below). Some of the characteristics of readers at each phase are listed below. These characteristics are not included as checklists, nor are they definitive or exhaustive. It is most unlikely that any child will display all of the characteristics listed. It is likely, however, that each will show evidence of competence in some characteristics from more than one phase at any one time. Some of the attitudes, understandings, and behaviors of previous phases and levels will continue to be evident as children become more skilled. These become the launching pads for further learning.

The Emergent Phase

Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enjoys “playing” with the rhythm and rhyme of language and is keen to hear and use new language.• Is keen to listen to and participate in stories, rhymes, and poems.• Expects to make sense of what is read to him/her and what he/she reads.• Is keen to return to and respond to some books and stories.• Wants to read and sees him/herself as a reader.• Is confident in asking an attempt and responds to feedback.
Understandings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Know how stories and books work; understands that the text, as well as the illustrations, carry the story.• Recognizes book language and sometimes uses this in speech, retellings, writing, or play.• Demonstrates the importance of background knowledge and uses it to predict and construct meaning.• Experiences success which drives the child on to further reading.• Is aware of some print conventions, especially those relevant to directionality, capital letters, and full stops.
Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Plays” at reading; handles books confidently—interprets pictures, uses pictures to predict text, retells a known story in sequence; and develops a memory for text.• Finger-points to locate specific words and focuses on word after word in sequence—finger, voice, and text match; uses some letter-sound links.• Explores new books and returns to favorite books.• Chooses to read independently at times.

The Early Phase

Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is eager to listen to and to read longer stories.• Expects to be able to get meaning from text and is willing to work at getting meaning.• Shows confidence in taking risks and making approximations.• Is confident in sharing feelings about and responses to books.• Is keen to read to others and seeks feedback.
Understandings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shows increasing knowledge of print conventions.• Associates sounds with letter clusters as well as individual letters.• Understands the importance of a self-monitoring and improving system in developing oneself as a reader.• Understands how real and imaginary experiences influence the meaning gained from books.• Increases sight vocabulary rapidly.• Understands the role of prediction in meaning-making.
Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Makes greater use of context and illustrates for more accurate predictions.• Selects and integrates appropriate strategies more frequently.• Reads on as well as rereads to regain meaning and confirms meaning by cross-checking to known items.• Chooses to read more frequently and enjoys a greater variety of genres and themes, more characters, scene changes, and episodes.• Frequently explores books independently.

The Fluency Phase

Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expects to meet reading challenges but is more confident of overcoming them; is eager to extend reading interests.• Is keen to take initiative in responding to books.• Expects others to consider his/her responses to books.• Does not expect to agree with everything that is read but regards books as providing answers to many questions.• Expects books to be a part of daily life and seeks time to read.
Understandings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knows to focus on details of print only when meaning is lost.• Understands that taking risks and making approximations are an essential part of reading.• Is aware of a variety of genres and can identify elements.• Understands that authors and illustrators have individual voices and styles.• Understands how to adjust reading pace to accommodate purpose, style, and difficulty of material.• Know how to use the library.
Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Samples text rather than focuses on every detail; uses increasing knowledge of letter clusters, affixes, roots, and compound words to confirm predictions.• Uses strategies of sampling, predicting, confirming, and self-correcting quickly, confidently, and independently.• Sets own purpose for reading; chooses to read for pleasure as well as for information; uses the table of contents.• Makes inferences from text and illustration; maintains meaning over longer and more complex structures.• Can read for longer periods of time; handles more complex characters and less predictable texts.• Summarizes text for retelling; responds in various ways, including critically.

What to Know and Do

Learning to read, like all human endeavors, is developmental. And while there are developmental patterns and touchstones among all children, each child also follows his or her own learning pathway. Literacy researcher Margaret Mooney never intended educators to use her Developmental Reading Continuum as a checklist; rather, it provides an overview of the developmental terrain young readers typically travel as they enter the exciting world of reading.

Of paramount importance is meaning—because without comprehension there is no reading. Above all, do children understand that reading is 1) supposed to make sense? And 2) supposed to sound like language? And then, if meaning is lost and the language of the text becomes nonsensical, do they have strategies to regain meaning and get back on a meaningful text track?

Consider using Mooney's Developmental Reading Continuum as a guide for your anecdotal record-keeping. Use her phases of learning to track, monitor, and document the attitudes, understandings, and behaviors you observe in your children's development, noting their engagement with and enjoyment of reading, especially since engagement builds confidence and confidence enables the risk-taking that's always entailed in successful learning. Confident readers are willing to "have a go" with a wide range of texts, trusting that as they plunge forward in the pages, they will be able to usher forth the skills and strategies they need to make predictions about the text at hand and read for meaning with increasing pleasure and enjoyment.

More to Know and Do

A child's progress through the various phases of reading development is enhanced when they are able to enjoy books "that are rewarding and have meaning." The plethora of books on the market and books already available in schools means we should identify those which have the best potential for helping children to become successful and satisfied readers. Each book needs to be considered for the supports and challenges it offers children.

However, teachers need to remember that the supports and challenges in any one book will differ from child to child and, for any one child, from time to time. This will affect which books teachers select and how they present them. In other words, the books and reading material we provide our children to read is not incidental to their learning process—it's essential!

How to Reach Me

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patricia_A._Edwards

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